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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/11/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PROP](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: LOCAL STAFF HARANGUED WHILE DONATING BOOKS

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4 (d).

11. (C) On December 11, public affairs section local staff reported being closely scrutinized by a plainclothes Eritrean National Security Agent (ENSA) during a routine book drop-off to the American Corner in Dekemhare, 25 miles south of Asmara. According to one local staff, the agent rifled through the boxes of children's books, presumably searching for subversive material. The agent later approached the staff member asking where else they planned to travel and what other plans they had in Dekemhare. The LES told the agent they were only dropping off books at the Center. The LES team was initially tasked to also drop a donation of books at the Dekemhare Faith Mission. Fearing the church might face harassment, the staff aborted this mission. The local staff informed EmbOff that the agent in question is the same person who inspected the books during a similar trip to Dekemhare two months prior.

12. (C) COMMENT: Although the LES team was clearly dropping off children's books, the fervor with which the ENSA inspected the books is a clear-cut example of the regime's paranoia. The local staff suspect the agent learned of the book drop-off during a routine phone call from the local staff in an attempt to reach the mayor of Dekemhare. End comment.
MCMULLEN